

A Generous Nation

— *some thoughts on personal and community philanthropy*

by vivian Hutchinson

vivian Hutchinson is the editor of *The Jobs Letter*, a trustee of The Jobs Research Trust, and Community Adviser to the Mayors Taskforce for Jobs. This paper is based on his keynote speech to the *Community Philanthropy in New Zealand* workshop held in Tauranga 18-20 March 2002.

*“ In time you’ll see that some things
Travel faster than light
In time you’ll recognise that
Love is larger than life*

*And praise will come to those whose kindness
Leaves you without debt
And bends the shape of things
That haven’t happened yet ... ”*

— Neil Finn

1.

The great New Zealand songwriter, Neil Finn, would probably be the last person to explain to you what his songs are about. Part of the gift of his craft is that so many of us imagine we can read our lives into his music. And we all read different lives.

I came across his song *Faster Than Light* on a charity CD single that he released to raise funds for the Fred Hollows Foundation. To me, the chorus of this song is about philanthropy ... the kindness that *Leaves you without debt / And bends the shape of things / That haven’t happened yet*.

Philanthropy is a form of “organised kindness”. It is an important part of the soul work of community-building. All the major religious traditions have recognised the importance of philanthropy in creating the communities we want to live in.

Although spirituality is often credited as a motivating factor behind acts of philanthropy ... there is a certain awkwardness when talking about *money* and *soul*. We find it hard to have an authentic conversation with each other about that face of money which is also an expression of kindness, of love, and of generosity.

Instead, we wrap our hearts in the language of the marketplace ... so that the purpose of our hearts can have *currency* in this day and age. We speak of “social capital”, of “social entrepreneurs”, of “social audits”, “efficiencies”, “marketing”, “fundraising” and “donor needs”. And philanthropy is reduced to becoming the “business” of giving money away.

Yet it is worth remembering that the word *philanthropy* comes from Greek roots which literally mean *the love of man*. The derivation of this word does not mention money at all.

The organisers of this workshop have set a challenging mission of trying to stimulate greater levels of personal and community philanthropy amongst New Zealanders.

We may not be song writers. But I suspect we need to start this task from a place where we can also reach into the deeper layers of the New Zealand psyche ... and frankly speak to each other of a *love for people*.

2.

I have been invited to this workshop as a participant. I haven't been part of the organising committee, nor am I part of the specific objective of fostering Community Foundations.

But I do share the vision that New Zealand could become a more generous nation.

I am an employment activist with a passion for creating and motivating activities at a community level. The main experience I bring to this workshop is the fact I have spent most of my adult life within a social economy where my work exists and is funded by the "organised kindness" of fellow New Zealanders.

This has enabled me to create local community organisations and run programmes for the unemployed. I have set up the Skills of Enterprise business courses and Enterprise Centres. I have created media projects that try to keep us on the plot of what's possible in making a difference on unemployment and poverty in this country. I have helped establish government agencies and government programmes which focus on these issues. I have also helped encourage local authorities to set up economic development agencies, and to look at the "big picture" behind what is happening to work and livelihood in their communities.

All this work has been made possible through the private funding of individuals, charitable trusts or businesses ... or from the social funding of government or local authorities.

So it is a privilege to be able to come to a workshop like this, and to be part of a conversation about how we catalyse more personal and community giving in New Zealand.

Actually, there are hundreds of people in the community sector who would love to be in this room and be a part of this conversation.

So many of us are trapped in funding relationships which put philanthropic trusts and government departments on one side ... and community groups and other worthy causes on the other side — often cap-in-hand.

There are so few places where we get the opportunity to step outside our normal roles and together ask deeper questions about the generosity of New Zealanders.

I have come to this workshop having thought about some of the characteristics of New Zealanders as givers ... and also, as an activist, I have been thinking about how funders can better support innovation and risk-taking at a community level.

Hopefully, over the next couple of days, these thoughts can ripen ... and we can all get a better handle on the challenges that philanthropy evokes in our personal lives and in the lives of our communities.

3.

How can we encourage more New Zealanders to be generous? I think we need to start by affirming that this is a *cultural* mission.

It is not that *structures* are unimportant in working towards a goal of a more generous nation. But I do think it is important to affirm that this job is about investing in culture first ... before we put our efforts into new structures.

Sometimes it is easier to talk about structures and processes, and to wrap our goals within the “let’s-get-on-with-it” language of business.

But it is much more difficult to have a *cultural conversation* with each other about the nature of our generosity. And that is the challenge of a workshop like this.

One of the aims of this workshop is also to talk about Community Foundations as an emerging tool for generating more giving amongst New Zealanders.

Tim McMains of the Tindall Foundation tells us that Community Foundations do offer an important difference to the traditional Community Trusts. He says they don’t follow the fundraising approach that tries to “sell” a giver on the benefits of a particular cause ... but instead they try to market philanthropy and generosity itself, and then help make the connections on behalf of the donor.

This makes sense to me because it is more about getting the *culture* right, and then letting the *structures* follow.

But I don’t think it is necessarily helpful to start a meeting like this by asking: Are Community Foundations the right way to go?

I would invite a deeper *strategic* question: What would it look like if generosity was stitched into the very identity of New Zealanders?

4.

New Zealand is already *an abundant nation*.

My own view is that most of our social challenges are largely problems of distribution and of political and governance choices.

New Zealand may be an abundant nation, but we are not yet *a generous nation*. And the gap between our existing abundance and our potential generosity ... is *a cultural gap*.

This gap has to do with our personal attitudes as to what is “enough” ... and our personal fears for the future.

It has to do with our existing cultural views how “money” fits into the world. It has to do with how our cultural views on both “giving” and “receiving” are already stitched into our identity as New Zealanders.

Culture is not a static thing, and it is changing all the time.

It is *a system*. New Zealand society is made up of individuals, of families, of groups and organisations, of schools, of churches and marae, of businesses and of governance. All these are woven ... and they are inter-dependent with one another.

In working towards a vision of a more generous nation, we need to explore strategies that will influence and move the current values and choices that exist on all these levels.

Culture changes by *valuing other goals* and *making other choices* ... and this usually happens one person and one community at a time.

It changes through leadership, through role-modeling, and through statesmanship that embodies these different values and choices. And, over time, these differences become stitched into our shared identity of who we think we are.

5.

Part of the reason we don't have a big philanthropic tradition in New Zealand — as compared to places like the United States — is cultural. And it has been influenced by the creation of the Welfare State.

Early last century we handed over the “organisation of our kindness” to the State. This was a powerful thing, and certainly a good thing. Through the State we created major institutions that brought people out of poverty, gave them good housing, healthcare and access to education and training. For a while, we also achieved full employment.

But, in this new century, we find ourselves facing challenges that the Welfare State was not designed to face. Poverty has returned to the national landscape, and one in eleven New Zealanders are out of work and want a job. The Health and Education systems are in trouble. And despite the re-*structuring* and corporatisation of many of our public services ... we are still faced with deeply ingrained challenges.

There is also a problem with attitudes.

It's a thorny subject in the community sector to talk about the Welfare State creating a *dependency* in people, as it is often seen as part of the “blame the victim” rhetoric that poorer people are forced to endure.

I don't think the “welfare trap” is as universal as some politicians and commentators would have us believe ... but I do agree that it is a reality. My own experience in managing work schemes — and having many friends who have been unemployed — is that, after a while, dependency can become a locked-in lifestyle.

Part of the answer to this is not to do away with the Welfare State — as is often advocated — but to re-invent it. This is a political task, and it is encouraging to see a few leaders in our current government starting to get to grips with this fundamental challenge.

But there is another factor here which is hardly ever addressed in the current debate: the re-invention of welfare is also a *personal task*. Our job here is also to take back some personal responsibility for philanthropic purposes.

One of the shadows of the Welfare State is that people feel that, as long as they are paying taxes, they are “off the hook” in terms of social responsibility.

Let me be clear: I don't advocate putting every social responsibility into the hands of private philanthropy. Nor do I want to see government departments cut back any further on their commitments to adequately fund and support social services.

But I do believe we need to grow a greater *personal* component to our view of New Zealanders as givers. It is this personal component that will be an important ingredient in re-inventing our Welfare State ... into a generous nation.

6.

I became a philanthropist when I first went on the dole.

This was the early 1980s, and I had moved back to my home town in Taranaki after living in Auckland for a few years. Unemployment was rising everywhere, and I decided this was an important issue for me to focus on.

The Salvation Army was just starting their first work schemes and I joined their work. What I found was that there was plenty of government funding available if we wanted to organise work gangs cutting scrub on the edges of town ... good work, which kept us satisfied for quite some time.

But there was little money available if you wanted to do something deeper about the issue of unemployment.

So when my supervisor contract ran out, I went on the dole to support my work and vision for wider community action on employment. Actually, I just kept on turning up to my office at the Sallies — and I got tremendous support from them for the projects I was trying to create.

Going on the dole brought up all sorts of feelings in me about my self-worth, my place in the community ... and my attitudes to money. I also started to think more about the nature of abundance and my own generosity.

It was at this time that an Australian accountant called Lionel Fifield was doing a lecture tour of New Zealand. His presentations centred around personal growth and self discovery ... and he also spoke about our *personal relationship with money*. He came to New Plymouth, where I found his message — and his example — very challenging.

Lionel's view was that, when it comes to money, many people's lives are *stuck* because they only see themselves as *receivers*. He told powerful stories of how people and communities construct all sorts of blocks surrounding the *giving* and *receiving* of money in their lives.

His view was that an ungenerous person was like *a dam* in the flow of money. Just as it is a “natural” law that most of us need an income to survive ... so too is it a “natural” law that we need to practice generosity in our lives.

At the time, I could see how his stories related to my own experience of welfare dependency. I could see that the “stuck-ness” came as much from defining yourself as a *receiver* as it did from being in a structural “welfare trap”.

Lionel advocated *tithing* — and it was the first time I had heard of this term outside of a Christian context. He wasn't, however, talking about giving money to a church ... but about giving 10% of your income to the current point of inspiration in your life and to the people and organisations who you think are doing great work for a common good.

7.

Lionel Fifield himself was an inspirational figure. Unlike the later 1980s New Age movement that got into marketing “abundance consciousness” and all sorts of pyramid schemes ... this Australian accountant made it quite clear that he had no vested interest in changing anybody, nor did he ever claim to be right.

He also didn't charge a cent for his lectures.

Actually, I would have to admit that his lecture made me quite grumpy.

I spoke to him afterwards, and complained: “You’ve never lived on the dole in Taranaki!”

At this time the unemployment benefit was about \$66 per week. I had no savings in the bank ... and I certainly didn’t *feel* abundant. In fact I was sinking into a rather black mood.

Lionel challenged me to give the tithing a go ... which I did. Each week I put \$6 aside, and when it had accumulated to \$100 I sent off an anonymous cheque to someone who I thought was doing good work.

There was nothing magic about it. I just lived on less.

Yet, in the meantime, something lifted inside me ... and I found myself in a wholly different head-space. It did feel like a dam was opening and a river was flowing again. I was still on the dole ... but I was also part of a flow of abundance that I was contributing to.

From then on, tithing just became part of the framework of how I ran my personal finances ... and remains so today.

There are lots of New Zealanders who tithe their personal income, and my story is by no means a unique example.

I have heard similar stories from many of my friends and colleagues who have also taken up tithing as a way of affirming the importance of generosity and philanthropy in their personal lives.

Over the past twenty years, this has also been a critical component in how we have supported each other’s work for the common good.

8.

When I say this is a *cultural* challenge, I don’t just look to the Christian roots of tithing to give us some idea on how to generate more philanthropy at a personal and community level.

In my early 20s, much of my social education and community activism took place within a Maori context.

I was involved with Whina Cooper and Te Roopu o Te Matakite on land rights issues in the mid-1970s. I also took part in the restoration and refurbishment of the Te Niho o Te Atiawa meeting house on Parihaka marae, and in organising cross-cultural events introducing Pakeha people to things Maori.

This was a time when the Maori renaissance was just beginning and many country marae were still very poor and often deserted places.

It was interesting for me to discover how the marae “made ends meet”.

They did so not by selling things... but through the cultural economy of *koha*.

When you went to a meeting on a marae you didn’t pay a “registration fee”. You left money behind as your *koha* — the amount depending upon your ability to pay.

Hospitality was provided — and it certainly was abundant and generous. The food in the freezers was replenished, and building supplies bought for refurbishing ... all from the *koha* of *manuhiri* or visitors, and from the gifts from surrounding families.

Koha is most often equated to being a donation ...but it is also much deeper than that. It is an important cultural understanding of how things get paid for in a social sphere. It is an *ethic*, and quite a strong ethic.

There are many definitions of koha within Maoridom ... and it has been changing over the last generation. There are also many varieties of koha that are not money.

Yet my guess is that if we are looking at how generosity can be stitched into the identity of all New Zealanders ... then it may look very similar to the ethic of koha found within Maoridom.

9.

Welfare dependency is not just something that is experienced by individuals. It can also be felt by community groups.

It might seem strange ... but despite community groups being set up to do “good works”, they can sometimes also be the most miserable people when dealing with matters of money.

Imagine: You are at a public meeting somewhere in New Zealand discussing a shared community problem or a creative challenge.

It might be an environmental group saying they want to plant trees all along State Highway One. Or it might be a community group saying: “Lets make sure all our young people have got something useful to do.”

The meeting starts to brainstorm all sorts of solutions — and we all know that Kiwis are quite good at this part. The ideas start to fly and lists are drawn up.

After about forty minutes into the meeting, there is usually somebody who gets tired of the brainstorm and decides to lead the group back to “reality”.

This person gets up and gives the familiar reminder: “There’s just one problem — we don’t have any money!”

Everyone looks at each other — they know this is true — and the whole energy in the room subsides.

More recently, however, there has been a saviour emerge at every one of these meetings. Someone else in the room stands up and says: “I’ve heard that the Department of Internal Affairs or the Department of Labour funds people just like us!”

There is a sigh of relief around the room ... and, in another good Kiwi tradition, a sub-committee is set up to look at “fundraising” ... and that is sometimes also the end of it.

10.

My experience of meetings on the marae is that it is often different.

When the debate reaches the “a-ha” point and people feel inspired and decide on a particular direction or strategy ... the *kaumatua* or elders will often seek to crystallise the commitment in terms of koha.

You wouldn’t be surprised if one of the Aunties reaches into her purse, pulls out a \$20 note, and puts it on the table saying: “There’s a start!”

They just expect it to be that way. It's cultural.

It's about opening the dam. And that \$20 is probably worth thousands of dollars to the project in terms of the commitment it generates in that room, and in the community.

I've tried this strategy out at other community gatherings that are not being held in a Maori context.

When the meeting reached its "a-ha" point — and before someone stands up and says, "There's just one problem..." — I have put \$20 on the table as a way of saying: "Here's a start!"

It has usually been met with muffled embarrassment. Or people are just bewildered.

It's cultural. The average New Zealander does not expect to immediately organise their enthusiasm in terms of *money*.

It brings up all sorts of stuff about "giving" and "receiving" ... and the fears, judgments and expectations we carry about how money can or should be managed.

11.

When a group of friends set up the Jobs Research Trust, after 15 years of being involved in different community organisations ... we decided to establish a Trust that was institutionally generous ... and would practice tithing as a group.

Before we gained the support of the Mayors Taskforce — which now means that *The Jobs Letter* is distributed free-of-charge — we used to "make ends meet" by selling subscriptions. We also gave 10% of them away.

For any contract income earned through the Trust, we also put 10% aside and distributed it — usually anonymously — to the people who inspire us or to people we want to encourage in their work.

We are not talking about large amounts of money here ... in fact it is not about the *amount* of money. We have done this because we didn't just want to see ourselves as *receivers*, but as *givers* as well.

The Trust has actually had quite a difficult time in terms of funding over the last eight years. There have been considerable periods of time when the only funding coming in was from the donations and koha of our friends.

And when we have run out of funds, our trustees have put in their own money or made loans to cover our operating expenses.

Yet amidst these funding difficulties, our own practice of koha has continued.

We have seen it as an essential part of the life of the Trust. For us, it has been about completing a circle of receiving and giving. This is a circle of *inter-dependence* that weaves the social economy of which we are a part, and which we want to see thrive.

12.

Community groups have generally had a tough time in the last 15 years.

The Christchurch Mayor, Garry Moore, often says that community groups haven't been on their knees ... but on their faces.

Under the current government, I recognise that this climate is changing ... but there is still a long way to go.

During the dark decade of the 1990s, many community groups tried to squeeze their sense of service into a market model.

The language of the marketplace became a filter through which they saw the world — the people they were serving became redefined as *clients* with consumer needs, rather than fellow *citizens* with human rights.

Many community groups re-defined themselves as *contractors* which provide social services to government departments. They started to see themselves only in terms of where the next contract was coming from.

And they very quickly became dependant on those contracts.

Despite the important work that many of these groups were doing in terms of community service, they were often made to feel like “charity cases” by their funders. And in their headspace these groups became *receivers*, rather than *givers*.

13.

Recently, I was asked to speak to a network of community groups in the South Island. They were all involved in employment or social services, and were doing great work. And there were the familiar stories of constantly struggling with the finances.

They specifically wanted me to talk about fundraising ... so I thought I would start off by asking a few provocative questions:

How many of you are putting your own money into your activities? How many of your trustees are prepared to back you financially? How many of you speak to your friends about what you are doing and that you need financial help?

The responses were fascinating. Only a few of the groups said they were putting their own money in, or had trustees that would be prepared to.

This begged a further question: Why do you expect other people to invest in your vision for your community if you are not prepared to invest in it yourself?

I have asked these questions in other public meetings and have received similar responses. People say: get real ... this is my job! Or they say: I give lots of time ... do you really expect me to give money as well?

Well, yes. We have no hang-ups about being generous with our time. Why is it that in many groups it is almost unthinkable to consider being just as generous with our own money?

I'm not suggesting the people who set up community groups should expect or try to pay for everything themselves. Building funding partnerships is an important challenge to the community sector, and a challenge we can still learn a lot about.

But I do believe that the people with the most interest in a vision for a community project should be the first to start the ball rolling in terms of their own financial contributions. At the very least, it should be trustee-led.

In my experience, it gives a whole different sense of ownership, alignment and commitment to the community enterprise.

Again, I am not talking about the *amount* of money here ... but more the recognition that this is an important starting point.

The economic life of a project shouldn't just begin when a funding application is approved by a philanthropic trust or a government department.

It needs to begin much closer to home.

14.

So how do we catalyse more personal and community philanthropy in New Zealand?

In summary, I think it is important to affirm that this is a cultural mission, and that it starts with values and choices at a personal and community level.

Our job as New Zealanders is not just to start to define ourselves as generous people ... but to stitch that generosity into the way we run our personal finances, our family finances, our community organisations, our schools, our churches, our marae, our businesses, our governance ... and also our role as a country in terms of world service.

There are all sorts of ideas on how we do this ... and much more is bound to emerge over the next two days of this workshop.

Thank you for inviting me to be a part of this process and for the chance to help get this conversation started.

Vivian Hutchinson

vivian Hutchinson
March 2002

NOTES and LINKS

This paper is dedicated to Jocelyn Gibson 1955-1996, economist, labour activist and philanthropist.

- The *Community Philanthropy in New Zealand* workshop was organised by the Tindall Foundation. Its aim was to commence a national dialogue on encouraging and facilitating individual generosity in New Zealand, and to explore the concept of Community Foundations as a means for achieving this aim. The workshop included 55 invited participants from private and public philanthropic trusts and foundations, and government departments.

Other speakers at the workshop included Dame Silvia Cartwright (New Zealand's Governor General), Stephen Tindall (founder of The Warehouse Group), Peter Wyatt (Compass Community Foundation), Jenny Gill (Wellington Community Foundation), Adrian Feasey (United Way), Hemi Toia (Community Self Help) and Janis McCardle (Manukau Trust).

- This paper is also available on the internet at www.jobsletter.org.nz/vivian/gen02.htm, or can be downloaded in pdf format at www.jobsletter.org.nz/pdf/gen02.pdf.

Other papers from the *Community Philanthropy in New Zealand* workshop are available on the Tindall Foundation's website at www.tindall.org.nz.

- Special thanks to Tim McMains and Evelyn Gauntlett.
- Neil Finn's "*Faster Than Light*" is from his solo debut album *Try Whistling This* (1998 EMI Records Ltd).

A live version, recorded at Abbey Road, can be heard on Neil Finn's charity CD single "*I Can See Clearly Now*", which raised funds to help the sight-restoring work of the Fred Hollows Foundation. Finn is a New Zealand Board Member on this Foundation which helped pioneer the 20-minute operation that restores sight to a cataract blind patient, literally overnight.

- Lionel Fifield is the co-founder of the Relaxation Centre of Queensland, a unique adult educational organisation. Lionel travels extensively throughout Australia, and in many other countries, speaking to diverse audiences on a range of themes including prosperity, self esteem, honesty, relationships, laughter, listening and being true to one's self. He is the author of several books, including "*Your Partnership with Life*" (pub 1990). The Relaxation Centre, cnr Brookes and Wickham Streets, Fortitude Valley, Brisbane, Queensland 4006, Australia.
- vivian Hutchinson has been one of the pioneers in community-based action for jobs in New Zealand, especially in establishing programmes for the support and education of unemployed people. He was a founder of the Taranaki Work Trust, and its associated projects in the Starting Point Employment Resource Centre, Skills of Enterprise Business Courses, and the Enterprise Centre. He has also been involved in establishing many practical training programmes for unemployed people, and the Green Dollar local employment trading networks.

As an adviser, vivian Hutchinson has helped with the establishment of enterprise and economic development units at a local government level, the creation of the Labour Department's Community Employment Group and Be Your Own Boss programmes, and has been an adviser to Local Employment Co-ordination (LEC) groups, and the Mayors Taskforce for Jobs.

Previous speeches and papers by vivian Hutchinson can be accessed from his homepage at www.jobsletter.org.nz/vivian.htm. These include:

Making Hope Possible — some thoughts on the Mayors Taskforce for Jobs (2000)
available at www.jobsletter.org.nz/vivian/mtfj2000.htm.

A Capable Age — some thoughts on the "zero waste" of young people (2002)
available at www.jobsletter.org.nz/vivian/youth02.htm.

- The Jobs Research Trust was established in 1994 "*... to develop and distribute information that will help our communities create more jobs and reduce unemployment and poverty in New Zealand*".

Trustees include vivian Hutchinson, Jo Howard, Dave Owens and Rodger Smith. Secretary is Shirley Vickery. Contact: P.O.Box 428, New Plymouth, Taranaki, New Zealand phone 06-753-4434, fax 06-753-4430, email trustees@jobsletter.org.nz.